

# PRAYER IS THE JOY OF LIFE

Formation programme on prayer  
based on text and videos  
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# 1

## Prayer is the joy of life

### Video

<https://youtu.be/fWz8BWHJYYA?si=18S-ywOpKAEcswfi>

### Text

I will never forget the day I heard my Abbot say: “Prayer is the joy of life”!

As a young novice, I was given the task of keeping the church's two large stoves supplied with coal. I was filling buckets with coal to take to the church, when suddenly the Abbot passed by. His name was Dom Jean Chanut. He saw me at work and said, “Brother Olivier, let's pray together! I stopped filling my buckets. We say the Our Father and the Hail Mary together, and with a big smile, he said to me: “Prayer is the joy of life!”

I knew my Abbot well enough to know that he was not saying this to give me a good lesson in monastic discipline. It was a cry of the heart, a joyful cry straight from his heart. The joy of his life was prayer. He could wish nothing better for me. And today, in turn, I can hope nothing better for all of you listening to this program. I'm convinced of it myself: “Prayer is the joy of life!

Do not imagine that, to be able to say such a thing and try to live by it, you have to have climbed high up the ladder of holiness. Perhaps, but not necessarily! And above all, do not think that prayer, however fervent it may be, immediately eliminates any kind of trial, that everything will be all right, and that all you have to do is let yourself live quietly in God's arms! If this were the case, everyone would be devoting themselves to prayer. But that is not the case. Many do not pray, or seldom do, because they feel it's pointless. They do not dare to venture out in earnest and with perseverance on the path of this boundless joy.

Dom Jean was a holy man, a man of God, but he had a very anxious temperament... He said that, often in his dreams, he would run to catch the train, but the train would leave without him! So, prayer was there to bring him back to reality by putting him back into the boat of trust in God, the boat of unshakeable confidence in God. One of his favourite refrains was: “Christ is risen, alleluia! He said it, he sang it, he lived it, with a conviction he passed on to me and which he took from the great St. John Chrysostom: “He who prays holds in his hand the helm of the world!”

### Personal reflection

Where is your desire to pray rooted? What do you seek in prayer? Is prayer the joy of your life — the deep joy of someone who feels connected to the source of life, the joy that renews you, expands your heart, and fills it with hope?

### **Community reflection**

Prayer is at the heart of monastic life and eloquently expresses its *raison d'être*: the search for the face of God. Seven times a day, the community gathers in prayer... 'Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.' Is community prayer truly our treasure—a source of joy, even when we are tired? Do we still desire to be in communion with our brothers and sisters, even when we have pending tasks that seem more urgent? Are there ways we can improve our community prayer—making it more beautiful and participatory?

## 2

# Someone is knocking at the door

### Video

<https://youtu.be/Jr7rFV4DUtc?si=8Q4vEmPqh6ZejGfT>

### Text

Someone's at the door. Who's there? Have you ever thought that prayer - Christian prayer - is not primarily something we do ourselves, but something God does to reach out to us, each and every one of us?

God was interested in me before I was interested in him.

God was interested in you before you were interested in him.

God was interested in us, in all of us, before we were all interested in him.

In other words: God is always ahead of us. He always comes first, because he loves us. He runs after us...

When King David made this discovery, he was moved, turned inside out. This is what he sang in one of the psalms; here are a few verses:

*Before ever a word is on my tongue  
You know it, Lord, through and through.  
Behind and before you besiege me,  
your hand ever laid upon me.  
Too wonderful for me, this knowledge,  
Too high, beyond my reach. ... (Ps 138, 4-6)*

In the Gospels, many men and women have had this experience, starting with the Virgin Mary herself. She certainly didn't expect the visit she received. She was deeply moved by it. And let's not forget Zacchaeus' encounter with Jesus. This little man was looking for any way he could to see Jesus. He climbed up a sycamore tree, and Jesus called out to him and prayed: "Zacchaeus, come down quickly! I'd like to come to your house! Is that possible?" And Zacchaeus welcomed him with joy! That's what prayer is all about. Letting yourself be surprised by Jesus, like Zacchaeus.

Jesus is interested in me.

We are all chosen by the Lord. And each of us is absolutely unique in his eyes. He asks us to open the door. Let's listen to him. Let's learn to listen to him, to recognize

his visit, to feel his hand on our shoulder, to rejoice in his unfailing presence, reassuring, gentle, strong and loving.

### **Personal reflection**

God is not a love to be earned, but a free gift to be received. Prayer is making space for the gift of a Presence. How does this awareness translate into the way I pray? Even when life feels empty, do I still believe that God seeks me personally?

### **Community reflection**

A community gathered in prayer is a community called together, summoned by its Lord. Each brother or sister carries in his/her heart a story of love. How does this awareness of a love that precedes and calls us become “visible” in our liturgy? Is there a gesture or ritual that helps us remember this calling?

### 3

## Who are you, Lord?

### Video

<https://youtu.be/Q-IONjeN4RM?si=nyxYP1IxzgWF2OTj>

### Text

The great adventure of prayer begins when we take the risk of opening the door to Him who knocks. Usually, He chooses the back door. Not the beautiful front door through which we take pleasure in welcoming people. He prefers the door we usually keep closed, out of use... because this part of the house is hardly ever cleaned. It's this door that he asks us to open for him.

“Give me a drink” he said to the Samaritan woman. That's his prayer... culminating in his cry on the Cross: “I thirst!” God in need. God who thirsts. God in need of me, God in need of us. The Samaritan woman begins by resisting his request: “You, a Jew, are asking me, a Samaritan woman, to give you a drink! No, that's not right...” She resists this request but doesn't leave! So, the conversation begins: a dialogue she'll never forget.

That's what prayer is: a dialogue with God, a conversation with God, a face-to-face encounter. A face-to-face encounter that begins with a mutual taming and ends with the communion of love. An exchange of glances in which each person's heart reveals itself, opens up, and gives itself over to the other. “All that is mine is yours, and all that is yours is mine.

If that's what prayer is, it means that God presents himself to us as someone begging for love. He comes to ask me for the pittance he needs to live; He who is all-powerful in Love can live without me, but he doesn't want to live without me!

The farther we go along these ways of prayer, the more we fully we see the face of God's.

Sometimes he's a stranger who asks me for a drink;

Sometimes he's a doctor who comes to heal the misery of body and soul;

Sometimes he's a faithful friend who comes to my home to relax and receive all my confidences;

Sometimes he's the one to whom I can cry out in my distress and on whom I can pour out all my anger;

Sometimes he hides and sometimes he embraces me;

Sometimes he sheds tears and sometimes he exults in joy.

Jesus has told us everything about Him. True God and true man, He is the Prayer that God addresses to us: "*This is my beloved Son. Listen to Him!*"

### **Personal reflection**

One day, Jesus asked his disciples: "Who do you say I am?" How do I respond to this question? Who is Jesus in my life? He often enters our lives through the most unexpected door. What face of His has He revealed in my wounded flesh — the same face I continue to encounter in prayer?

### **Community reflection**

A thirsty God—"a God in need of me"—came to meet the thirst of each one of us, established a relationship, and gathered us into a community. We are a group of "the poor," called and brought together by pure love, so that we might encounter the Living Water. How does this reality shape our prayer, our fraternal life, and the hospitality we offer?

## 4

# Who am I?

### Video

<https://youtu.be/H4LeT1Ch4mY?si=qilgBrvgz0auBa0g>

### Text

I'm sure you're familiar with this parable: *“the Kingdom of Heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and covered up. Then, in his joy, he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.”* (Mt 13:44).

Have you ever thought that the One who knocks on your door, hoping you'll open up to him, is bearing a message that concerns you to the utmost? You are a “treasure”. Yes, nothing less than a treasure. A treasure for the King of Heaven. No one has ever told you that... Well, if you open the door to him, that's the first thing he'll tell you. Not just in words, but in deeds and in truth.

He, though divine, didn't consider equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself; he sold everything; rich as he was, he made himself poor to buy the field where the treasure he coveted was hidden. That means he values you. That field and that treasure are you! And he adds, almost trembling... because he's afraid you won't believe him: “Where my treasure is, there my Heart is too.”

Do you believe that? If you want to know who you are for him, open yourself to him, let him in, tell him to sit down, and above all listen to him! He knows that your field isn't all good soil, that here there are thorns, that there is more stone than clay. And yet he bought you at a high price, just as you are. You are worth nothing less than the Blood of Jesus Christ.

### Personal reflection

You are the hidden treasure in the field, for whom the Son of God—though in the form of God—became the least of all and gave His life to “gain you.” Do you believe that you are a treasure for God—you, just as you are, with nothing to hide? Is it this God, pure love, whom you encounter in your prayer?

### Community reflection

How do we look at one another? Do we focus only on the limits and faults of our brothers and sisters? Do we cultivate a way of seeing that, above all, recognizes the treasure that each person is—and that the community is as a whole? What might help us to see one another through the lens of the beauty that each of us bears?



## 5

# He does not come alone

### Video

<https://youtu.be/MWHVhJmb2Go?si=6LJKKdK9iX8XAGvO>

### Text

If it really is Jesus Christ who has entered your home, you will see that prayer is always a matter of presence. The presence of one to the other, even when the other is covered by the veil of absence. “Where are you, Lord?” If you will pay attention, listen to him answering you as if in a whisper: “You wouldn't be looking for me, if you hadn't already found me.”

Sometimes he reveals himself to you in solitude,  
Sometimes in a crowd.

Sometimes when you withdraw into secrecy to speak to him heart to heart, Sometimes during a prayer gathering, as he himself said:

*When two or three are gathered in my name, I am in their midst.*

Every day and every moment, he is there. He has promised and he keeps his promise. His presence is unfailing: *I am with you always, until the end of time* (Mt 28:20).

This leads me to tell you something important. Jesus, our Lord and Savior, cannot be dissociated from his Body, the Church. He is not merged with the Church, but inseparable from it. Jesus Christ and the Church are ONE. All of us who are baptized in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit are members of the Body of Christ, and it is the Church that teaches us to pray as a mother teaches her children to pray. She teaches us the Our Father, which is the Lord's prayer, the Hail Mary, which is the very prayer God addressed to the Blessed Virgin through his messenger, the angel Gabriel. She teaches us to say the rosary, the Gloria, the Magnificat, the Te Deum, the psalms, the great Trinitarian doxology that concludes all our prayers, and those two emblematic little words that sum up all Christian prayer: Amen - which means: Oh yes, I do! -and Alleluia - which means: Praise God!

### Personal reflection

Prayer is an encounter with your own heart, with God, and with your brothers and sisters. Prayer, starting from the intimacy of the heart, becomes an opening to the universality of the Body of Christ—the Church. Or, even more broadly, an opening to all humanity. Does my experience of prayer help me to break down boundaries and feel united with all people, starting with my brothers and sisters in community?

**Community reflection**

In our times, we are witnessing a cultural movement that promotes closed identities. Through prayer, do we feel united with the whole Church in all its diversity? What place do others—especially those we perceive as most different—occupy in our prayer? Is it true that prayer helps us grow in fraternity?

## 6

# Tending towards continual prayer

### Video

<https://youtu.be/0V96YZtjwRg?si=thyxoV4VWJcZB7DL>

### Text

Once you've discovered how good it is to open your door to the Lord Jesus, you won't want to leave him. We tend towards continual prayer. This doesn't mean we spend all our time praying, saying the rosary or reciting psalms; it means we habitually live in God's presence, under his gaze, wherever we are and whatever we're doing. Our heart is "taken". It allows itself to be freely captivated by God's presence. Life becomes more and more unified, like that of a lover who carries within him day and night the memory of the beloved's face. Of course, this doesn't happen overnight. It takes time to become a man of prayer, and we never really finish becoming one.

Saint Benedict, Patriarch of the monks of the West and one of the patron saints of Europe, sees the monastery as a school of prayer. And it's interesting to see how he talks about prayer. For him, prayer...is work: work *par excellence*. It is the source of work that gives meaning to all our other work. He gives a name to this prayer, calling it Opus Dei, the work of God, that is to say, a kind of work that we do in synergy: God with us and we with him. All our other work (opera) - in the garden, in the mill, in the kitchen, in the library, etc. - all our encounters, and the whole range of our activities have their source in it, and only then do they themselves become vehicles for prayer, of which the bread and wine offered at Mass are the most telling symbols.

All Christians are called to be pupils in the school of continual prayer. To do this, it's essential to have effective moments of prayer during the day: in the evening, in the morning, at midday... It's up to each of us to find the right moment to drink from the Source. For the rest of the day, it's enough to maintain a simple invocation such as: "God, come to my aid!", or "Lord, I trust in you!", or simply the name "Jesus" or "Mary", to which we can add - it's not forbidden! - I love you".

### Personal reflection

Our vocation as Christians—and even more so as monks and nuns—is to be transformed into prayerful beings: people who are aware of God's loving presence in everything we do and live. Prayer as a way of being, of living, of dwelling in the world. How do I live the relationship between the "explicit" moments of prayer and

the “implicit” prayer that is present throughout my life? Is my heart gradually becoming more unified?

### **Community reflection**

What can help us create an environment that is conducive to continuous prayer? Noise and haste, so present in social life, can easily enter the monastery. Do we take care of our environment? The way we inhabit our home, the atmosphere we create, the way we communicate... all of these can either foster or hinder a spirit of prayer. Are we aware that each person’s attitude plays a vital role in shaping this environment?

## 7

# Jesus Christ is not monotonous

### Video

<https://youtu.be/QQ9GKeJYBRc?si=0cBBQXu9PuUfQrZp>

### Text

When you have Jesus Christ as teacher and friend, prayer is not monotonous. You do not get bored with him. You move around a lot, even though you are a monk. You travel a lot. You meet lots of people of all ages and from all social classes. With him, every day, every week, every season has its own colour. The calendar year unfolds like a great prayer rug, with the Lord Jesus revealing to us one by one all his “mysteries.” The mysteries of the Rosary: joyful, lightful, sorrowful and glorious. And those that the liturgical year pours out on the People of God like a great dew of light: Advent, Christmas, Epiphany, Lent, Easter, Pentecost... right up to the feast of Christ, King of the Universe.

Basically, it is a matter of entering with the whole Church into the round of the contemplation of Jesus, the Lord, beginning with the Mystery of his Incarnation to that of his full Glorification at the right hand of God, passing through that of the Redemption of all humanity. Prayer then becomes like a dance whose rhythm is set by the Holy Spirit himself. Christ and the Church draw the whole of creation into it. From the crib to the cross, and from the cross to glory. This is how the baptized becomes truly Christian, and his heart truly Catholic: by taking on the dimensions of the Heart of Christ, we enter into the fullness of God.

Easter is, of course, the pivot around which all Christian prayer revolves. Jesus does not linger in the crib - we would get bored there. He grows up in Nazareth, then leaves his family. We find him on the banks of the Jordan, in the Judean desert, on the shores of Lake Tiberias, on Mount Tabor... Here, happily seated at table, there, inveighing against the party of good people. When the time comes, he becomes the Paschal Lamb whose flesh and blood save mankind. Three days later, all we hear is a cry, an immense cry of joy: “Christ is risen! He is truly risen!

Lord Jesus, we are never bored with you. Even Ordinary Time becomes extraordinary, full of your light.

### Personal reflection

Through prayer, we do not encounter only a multitude of people, but also all the colours of life. The mysteries of Jesus' life—from his birth to his glorification—illuminate every stage and situation of our existence. At the centre is the Paschal Mystery. In the light of the Resurrection, all is saved. All reality, whatever it may be, can be revealed full of light. Prayer is movement, it is Easter, it is a journey... Can I recall “places” full of light that I have found through prayer?

### **Community reflection**

The repetition of hymns, psalms, and other biblical texts does not mean that prayer is monotonous. What signs allow us to recognize that a praying community is transmitting life? Liturgy is both interiority and exteriority—an invisible mystery expressed through gestures and words... Do our gestures, attitudes, and words during liturgy help to express the mystery we celebrate? In this area, is there anything we might review?

## 8

# The Spirit of God dwells in you

### Video

<https://youtu.be/1iF82ngPi84?si=iYD3m8PblKPiqCiS>

### Text

In his first letter to the Christians of Corinth, the apostle Paul reminds them of the eminent dignity that springs, not from their social condition - most of his correspondents were “little people” without much education - but from their baptismal condition, which makes them living members of the Body of Christ: “*Don’t you know that you are God’s temple*” he tells them “*and that God’s Spirit lives in you? If anyone destroys God’s temple, God will destroy him; for God’s temple is holy, which you are.* (1 Cor 3:16-17).

The temple is a place of prayer, the place to worship God. In other words, Saint Paul reminds us that we ourselves, baptized in Christ's death and resurrection, are houses of prayer. Not just our souls, but our bodies and hearts - in other words, our entire being. We are temples of the Holy Spirit, who introduces us into the communion of love of the Father and the Son.

By reminding us of this, Saint Paul makes us attentive to what he calls “the inner man”, to all the movements of our interiority: our thoughts, feelings, affections, emotions, the desires of the Spirit, the groans of the Spirit, the whispers of the Spirit, everything that concerns the “guarding of the heart” so that we remain turned towards the “things above”, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. A Pentecost hymn phrases this beautifully:

*Turn your eyes to the host within,  
Wanting nothing but that presence;  
Live by the Spirit  
To be the one  
Who gives his name to your Father.*

Prayer, attentive to the movements of the Spirit, prevents us from living superficially, on the surface, buffeted by all the winds that make us live outside of ourselves, instead of dwelling within ourselves, as we say of the great Saint Benedict. The God of Jesus Christ is not a surface god, a superficial god. He comes to make his dwelling within us. He dwells in us, and we in him, and so we learn to live on earth as we do in heaven.

### **Personal reflection**

The privileged place of God's presence in the world is the human heart. We are the temple of God, the dwelling where God makes His home through His Spirit. God dwells within me—but do I also dwell within myself, as Saint Benedict dwelt within himself? Do I live attentively to the movements of the Spirit?

### **Community reflection**

Each brother or sister, even when deeply disfigured, carries within them the living presence of God; they are a dwelling place of the Spirit. The life of each brother or sister is an invitation to contemplation. What can help us, as a community, not to be paralyzed by the many poverty-stricken aspects of each person, but rather to live with a level of awareness that allows us to celebrate the mystery dwelling within us? Can we find a gesture that helps to ritualize the presence of the Spirit in each person's heart?

## 9

# What's the point?

### Video

[https://youtu.be/XONZsXwF7h4?si=NDyt8oQ\\_oy0MSIpi](https://youtu.be/XONZsXwF7h4?si=NDyt8oQ_oy0MSIpi)

### Text

It's not uncommon to meet people who ask, “What's the point of prayer?” I almost always start by telling them that there is no point. But we can't leave it at that. The answer would leave them unsatisfied. So, I use an image: the image of lovers running after each other because they're madly in love with each other. What's the point of running after each other? What's the point of making rendezvous? What's the point of being impatient to get together when you love each other? What's the point of showing each other love?

Love, when it's true, free and pure, is the best light we can shed on prayer. Whether it's conjugal love, friendship, parental love, filial love or any other form of true, free and pure love. It serves no purpose other than to say that we love each other. But in our lives, is there anything more necessary than receiving and giving love?

People who pray are great lovers. They spend their time in loving encounters. Day or night, whatever they're doing. Whether they're in front of the altar or near the tabernacle, in the solitude of their room or in a liturgical assembly, in their office or in their kitchen, on the bus or in a work meeting, they live under God's gaze, with their hearts clinging to God's Heart. And even when their attention... out of necessity or distraction is focused on something other than God Himself, their hearts remain attached to God, who prays to them with His own Heart.

Prayer is love. It is unnecessary, free, and unrestricted. There's never enough of it, and time is always too short.

### Personal reflection

Prayer—like all that is truly important in life—does not belong to the realm of usefulness, but to the realm of gratuity. Prayer is like love; it is the affair of lovers. The fruit of love is love itself. What is my experience of prayer? Do I feel weary? In prayer too, it is sometimes necessary to begin again—to return to our first love. Am I setting out on the journey?

### Community reflection

Prayer is our daily task, which at times we may experience as a burden. As a community, how can we help one another to keep alive the flame of love that gives vitality to our prayer?

## 10

### And if I can't...

#### Video

<https://youtu.be/Br3j93WL4RQ?si=IHclu0qGNMvfWCSy>

#### Text

We sometimes meet people who would like to pray but can't. Some don't know how to go about it, others don't know what to say, others have so many things to do that they don't know where to fit prayer into their lives; still others because they doubt God's existence.... What to say to all these people? I'll try to provide some answers:

For those who don't know what to say or how to go about it, I'd like to persuade them that the God of Jesus Christ isn't hard to please. He doesn't expect sublime prayers. He will be happy with small things, a few crumbs from the Church's table, an Our Father, a Hail Mary, a candle lit before an icon, a simple bouquet placed at the foot of the crucifix... These little things will touch him immensely, as long as you put your heart into them. And, little by little, they give us the desire to go further and further down the path of prayer, to find in it a greater and greater joy...

For those who have so much to do that they don't know where to fit prayer into their lives, I would like to warn them against burnout, and I dare to ask: how much room do they give over to gratuity in their lives, to relaxation, rest and leisure? Are they always in such a hurry that they become unreachable? Jesus challenges them head-on with the parable of the wedding guests, each of whom offers an excuse for not attending: one because he's involved in an important business deal, another because he's just got married, a third because another obligation requires him to be elsewhere, and so on. Beware of any form of activism that strangles and suffocates life!

To those who doubt the God's existence, I'd first like to express my gratitude, because they make me aware of the great gift of faith I've received, and they encourage me to give thanks to the Lord. And secondly, because to doubt is not to deny, but to seek and question. Let them dare to pray: "Lord, if you exist, come and knock on my door! Don't hesitate to knock loudly, because I'm very hard of hearing! I would so much like to believe in you!"

I have one more thing to say... for those who deny God's existence. It's true that it's not easy to believe in God. On the other hand, I'm sure they don't deny the existence

of the people around them who are sick or in prison, foreigners or migrants, maybe even starving and begging. Let them have no doubt that doing good for these people is worth a prayer!

### **Personal reflection**

The questions about prayer are many, and they accompany us throughout life. What is the best method? How should I be, or what should I say? With words, or without words? I feel nothing—am I doing it right? These questions have no definitive answers. Surrender with trust. Give the relationship time. Don't wait for everything to be perfect. Any gesture of love opens us to encounter. The time is now.

### **Community reflection**

In this time of acceleration and activism, even monks and nuns may feel they lack time: "I don't have time for lectio, for personal prayer..." Is this lack of time real? Is our community schedule structured in a way that allows for extended time for personal prayer? Is our daily rhythm balanced? Does it need to be adjusted?

## 11

# Forms of prayer: Thanksgiving

### Video

<https://youtu.be/xdQcowvYpZs?si=NaKkPb7KhoH-rxto>

### Text

The more we live in God's presence, the more prayer takes on all the different forms and circumstances of our lives. Wherever we are and whatever we're doing, our hearts are always watching over us in prayer, day and night. But to achieve this, it's absolutely essential to set aside time in our daily lives to devote exclusively to prayer. In this respect, I know no better “formator” than the Church herself, the bride of Jesus Christ and temple of the Holy Spirit. The Church's prayer catholicizes our heart, makes it universal, and opens it to the dimensions of God's Heart.

In my earlier remarks, I spoke about the content of the Church's prayer and presented it as the source of work that gives meaning to all our work. Now I'd like to focus on the main forms of this prayer: praise, thanksgiving, petition for forgiveness, supplication, shout, meditation, adoration and silence. The sacramental celebration of the Eucharist contains them all. It can be called the Prayer of prayers.

Let's start with thanksgiving and praise. This is the very meaning of the word “Eucharist”, which means “to give thanks”. Christian prayer is fundamentally an immense thanksgiving, an unlimited THANK YOU to God for the marvel of His creation and the even greater marvel of redemption. The culmination of this thanksgiving is the great “Eucharistic Prayer” at the heart of Mass. At this point, the whole congregation bonds with the priest, who, standing with arms wide open, sings aloud: *“It is truly right and just, our duty and our salvation, always and everywhere to give you thanks, Lord, holy Father, almighty and eternal God, through Christ our Lord...”*

Let's try to imagine what our days would be like if, on waking, we got into the habit of stretching out our hands towards Heaven and saying: *“Truly, it is right and good to give thanks to you always and everywhere; to you, most holy Father, eternal and almighty God...”*. And if, in the evening, before going to bed, with the same gesture of offering, we said the great doxology that crowns the Eucharistic prayer, with its “Amen” full of faith, hope and love. Surely, our whole life would become a living offering to the praise and glory of God! Isn't that the vocation of us all?

### Personal reflection

« Christian prayer is fundamentally an immense thanksgiving, an unlimited THANK YOU to God for the marvel of His creation and the even greater marvel of redemption. » A person who is grateful before God is someone capable of appreciating life beyond its limits, seeing it from its original source: a continuous love that offers itself so *that we may have life—and have it abundantly*. A love that looks upon us and *makes all things new*. A love that always saves. Is gratitude what most characterizes my prayer?

### **Community reflection**

Liturgical prayer is, above all, an expression of thanksgiving, joy, and praise for the work of God. Does our way of participating in communal prayer help express these sentiments? Or, carried along by routine, do we risk becoming insensitive to what we are celebrating? How can we renew our sense of wonder before God's work—especially the mystery of redemption we celebrate in the Eucharist?

## 12

# Forms of prayer: Petition

### Video

<https://youtu.be/f4K2o0K2n4A?si=o0DrIB7QCsdTjg3a>

### Text

On several occasions in the Gospels, Jesus proposes the prayer of petition. *“Ask, and you will receive; knock, and it will be opened to you; seek, and you will find.”* Elsewhere, he urges us to make our requests from the heart and in a spirit of faith: *“Believe that whatever you ask for in prayer, you will get,”* he says, provided it's done with a good intention. And for those who are disappointed at not being answered as quickly as they'd like, he adds the famous parable of the widow who pesters an unfair judge so hard that she finally wins her case (Lk 18:1-8).

Once again, let's take the Eucharist as the model prayer, and see what the Church teaches us to ask of the Lord: At the beginning of Mass, like prodigal children, we turn to God, our Father, to ask his forgiveness. He's not interested in our make-up. His mercy lifts us up, sets us right, and prepares us to listen to his Word.

Before entering the great Eucharistic prayer, the priest invites the whole congregation [in the French version]: *“Let us pray together as we offer the sacrifice of the whole Church”*. The congregation responds: *“For the glory of God and the salvation of the world”*. This is the boldest request we can make. It forces us to look much further ahead than our own little personal needs, however respectable they may be! The God of Christians is not a good little god for us. He is the eternal and all-powerful God who wants all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.

Another request is an integral part of the Eucharistic prayer, and deserves our attention. Before the consecration, the whole Church, through the voice of the priest who stretches out his hands over the bread and wine, invokes the Holy Spirit to make them become the Body and Blood of Christ. After the consecration, the priest invokes the Holy Spirit once again, so that all those who are about to receive the Body and Blood of Christ may be gathered into a single Body, forming a living offering to the glory of God. This is the Eucharistic Pentecost taking place before our very eyes. It is reminiscent of Jesus' injunction to his disciples: *“You who are evil know how to give good gifts to your children! How much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to all who ask him!”*

**Personal reflection**

As daughters and sons of God, we lay before Him our needs and those of the world—not so that our will may be done, but as an expression of our trust in His providential love. Do I live in this trust, believing that—no matter what happens—His plans are always plans of love and salvation?

**Community reflection**

In our prayer, we monks and nuns intercede for so many people who ask us to, and for the many painful situations we witness around us and in the world. As a community, are we truly sensitive to what is happening around us? Are we interested in what is going on in the world? Are we witnesses of God's love—the Good Shepherd of every human being?

## 13

# Silence and adoration

### Video

<https://youtu.be/opTZHM9Tyi4?si=8I4e3zIYfaXn-BCi>

### Text

Once again, the celebration of the Eucharist sheds light on two closely related forms of prayer: silence and adoration.

On several occasions, the Eucharistic liturgy gives way to what we've come to call “*sacred silence*.” It's a silence that imposes itself in the presence of the thrice Holy God. First, in preparation for the celebration of the Eucharist; before confessing together that we have sinned; then, whenever the priest invites the congregation to prayer; and again, after listening to the Word of God, to let it resonate deep in our hearts ; and also, after communion, so that the sacramental body to body encounter nourishes our own heart to heart with the Lord, and strengthens the life of all in the great ecclesial Body entrusted with announcing the splendour of the Mystery of faith to the whole world.

*Sacred silence* is the opposite of dead silence. It is as necessary to the Eucharistic celebration as rests and pauses are to the playing of a symphony. One of its greatest benefits is that it fosters recollection and a spirit of adoration. We are silent before God, not because we have nothing more to say, but because we lack the words to say everything we'd like to say. We are silent with God, not because we have nothing more to say to each other, but because we have too much to say to each other... that overflow of love that can only be poured out in a deep, shared silence.

It's sometimes said that silence is the music of heaven, the music of eternity that goes so well with the song of angels. When we enter a church, isn't this what strikes us? The great silence of God's house. An inhabited silence. A silence that compels us to kneel in the name of all humanity.

### Personal reflection

Beyond words, we discover an inhabited silence—resonant, full of life—that has nothing to do with mere muteness. A silence for encounter, for relationship, for love. Many people testify that, over time, their experience of prayer loses words and gains silence. What is my experience of silence? Am I afraid of silence? Do I seek it? Is it a “good place” that leads me to adoration?

### Community reflection

In the liturgy, the well-proclaimed Word and the well-executed gesture lead to prayerful silence, to adoration. In our communal prayer, do we value times of silence, which are essential for the breathing of the heart? Or do we fill those moments with words?

## 14

# The body and prayer

### Video

<https://youtu.be/cVNBI48Jv5w?si=0DnWXMd1odWZDbXR>

### Text

We are not angels. We are lucky to have a body. Let's make the most of it! It's up to us to make of it a magnificent instrument of prayer.

To pray is to see, hear, speak, sing, take, eat. Praying means sometimes kneeling, sometimes sitting, sometimes standing. Sometimes walking, sometimes running, maybe even dancing! Sometimes raising your arms, sometimes clapping your hands. Sometimes smiling, sometimes crying. Sometimes staying silent, sometimes shouting.

I'm often distressed to note how distracted I am in my prayer; how hard it is to really meditate. At the slightest opportunity, my attention wanders: my memory brings up an unpleasant meeting I had yesterday, the phone call I absolutely must make later, the visit I promised to make to a sick person, and of course the program for the next weekend with family or friends, etc., etc., etc... I must admit it: I'm elsewhere, yes... but my body is present. Admittedly, it's not very well attuned to my soul. Nevertheless, it expresses my deepest intention, which is to be here this morning at Mass with an entire congregation in prayer. It will also be there when we pray as a family before dinner, and this evening there will be a final prayer to say thank you to the Lord who has given us the gift of this day to bring us a little closer to him.

How can God, who sees the depths of our hearts, not reward my body, this good and faithful servant who often reminds my soul of that it must do good and please God? Standing, it awakens my soul to stand upright and resurrected before God. Sitting, it forces Martha, that perpetually restless part of me, to model herself on Mary, seated at the foot of Jesus, listening to his Word. On my knees, it leads my soul back to the adoration of the Most Holy God, to sincere contrition, to tenacious supplication for so many people who perhaps no longer know right from left, or chaff from wheat...

My body was given to me by the Lord so that I may be “like an additional incarnation”, says Saint Elisabeth of the Trinity. So, let's glorify God in our bodies!

### Personal reflection

We are an indivisible unity of soul and body, although not always in harmony. Bodily expression is fundamental in our spiritual life, especially in our prayer. Bodily expression invites the “inner person” to listen, to adore, to repent, and so forth. The outward gesture summons the inward attitude, and vice versa. How important is bodily expression in my prayer? Do I value it? Does my body pray as well?

### **Community reflection**

In our communal liturgy, do we value bodily expression? Do we recognize that bodily expression can help us be “whole,” unified in prayer, thereby giving it greater intensity? Can we take any steps to help bodily expression be more appreciated in our liturgy?

## 15

# The battle of prayer

### Video

[https://youtu.be/jL\\_FABnL260?si=DuNVHgxDCinTZWxs](https://youtu.be/jL_FABnL260?si=DuNVHgxDCinTZWxs)

### Text

*Prayer is the joy of life*, even if prayer sometimes becomes a hard struggle. A good illustration of this is Jacob's famous struggle with God, which lasted a whole night and left a mark on his hip socket for the rest of his life. But he came out of it blessed. Blessed for having been strong against God and, above all, ready to face up to the presence of his brother Esau in the same way he faced up to God (Gn 32, 23-33). In essence, Jacob's night of agony prefigured that of Jesus, who would have to face a mob who wanted him dead: *“Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me! Your will be done, not mine!*

Every Christian must have his battle dress ready at hand. Saint Paul does not mince his words on this subject when he writes to the Ephesians: *“Put on the armour of God so that you will be able to stand up to the devil's schemes... Always have in your hands the shield of Faith, receive the helmet of Salvation and the sword of the Spirit, that is, the Word of God”* (Eph 6:11...17). And do you know that, to honour the Virgin Mary, ecclesial piety goes so far as to compare her to *“an army arrayed in battle”*? She is indeed formidable to the demons and all the forces of evil that revolt against her children. She does her utmost to provide each one of them with the powerful weapons they need to win the victory of love and forgiveness.

Look to the saints! You won't find one of them who hasn't had to fight in prayer, not only to hold firm and not desert the battlefield when struggling against headwinds, but also to attack every form of Lie that poisons humanity. A short book was recently published entitled, *“Éloge d'une guerrière”* (In Praise of a Warrior). It makes you want to join the troops of the living God along with the Little Flower of Jesus. She's not the first to dive in and not look back. Susannah, Judith, Esther... Catherine of Siena, Edith Stein, Etty Hillesum, are of the same calibre. They're not afraid of Pharaoh's chariots. *“Let us sing to the Lord: magnificent is his victory! Horse and rider he has thrown into the sea!”*

### Personal reflection

There is no prayer without struggle. When we are inhabited by fear, by confusion, or when we feel nothing, when we see no answer or fruit, when everything invites us to give up, it is the moment to remain. Simply remain. The most powerful weapon is to disarm oneself, to surrender, and to trust. How do I live the experience of adversity in prayer? What if adversity were a springboard into the arms of the Father?

### **Community reflection**

If prayer is a personal struggle, then the praying community is like an army, where the strength of the whole is far greater than the sum of its individuals. As a community, do we encourage one another? Are we a school of prayer for candidates and others who come to us?

## 16

### The obscure good movements of the heart

#### Video

<https://youtu.be/ijCc-JSHGYs?si=zYKmdQFDWV18xPJ0>

#### Text

You may be familiar with Charles Péguy's beautiful writing on prayer, in *Le Mystère des Saints Innocents* (*The Mystery of the Holy Innocents*). God our Father declares himself set upon and even attacked by an immense fleet of prayer and penance, put in place by his Son to “split the flood of his wrath... bind the arms of his justice and unbind the arms of his mercy.” At the head of this battle fleet, “each *Pater* is like a tall ship”. A second fleet follows the first: these are “the Hail Mary’s that advance like galleys of the innocent. Then there's a third fleet, made up of all the other countless prayers: those said at Mass and Vespers, the monks' prayers that mark every hour of the day and night, the *Benedicite* said at table before a hot meal... And God adds:

*“I see yet another invisible fleet. These are all the prayers that aren't even said, the words that aren't spoken. I hear them: those obscure, good movements of the heart, which unconsciously spring up and rise towards me. The one who their source doesn't even see them. He knows nothing of them, but I gather them, and I count them, and I weigh them... “.*

Péguy is not a “Father of the Church”, but he was right, according to that evangelical righteousness that lets nothing go to waste! No more than the crumbs left over from the multiplication of the loaves, these innumerable crumbs of prayer, these innumerable good movements of the heart, will not remain lost. Day and night, the angels bring God baskets filled to the brim: crumbs of prayer, the man who lets his wife lead him into a church; crumbs of prayer, the sign of the cross made without really knowing what you're doing; crumbs of prayer, the beggar who sits on the porch of the church like Lazarus on the porch of the rich man's house; the family that places a candle in front of a statue of the Blessed Virgin; all those people who touch and feel the rock of the apparitions at Lourdes; all those who wear a medal to shelter themselves from life's misfortunes; all those who listen to church music, sometimes weeping, sometimes jubilant... simply to make themselves feel better, Christian or not.

This whole fleet of invisible prayers is one with the prayer of the Son of God: “Abba, Father! Glory be to you for ever and ever!

**Personal reflection**

Prayer is not always made up of words or even of clear intention. Prayer is connected to the deep movements of our heart, of which we are not always aware. Yet these are expressions of the truth of our being—a being in search of God. How do I live this “beyond” explicit prayer? For us, who tend to rationalize everything, what does this tell us? What do we learn?

**Community reflection**

As a community, can we learn something from the words that Péguy puts in God’s mouth—especially regarding how we look at those who do not have explicit faith and how we welcome them when they come to our monasteries?